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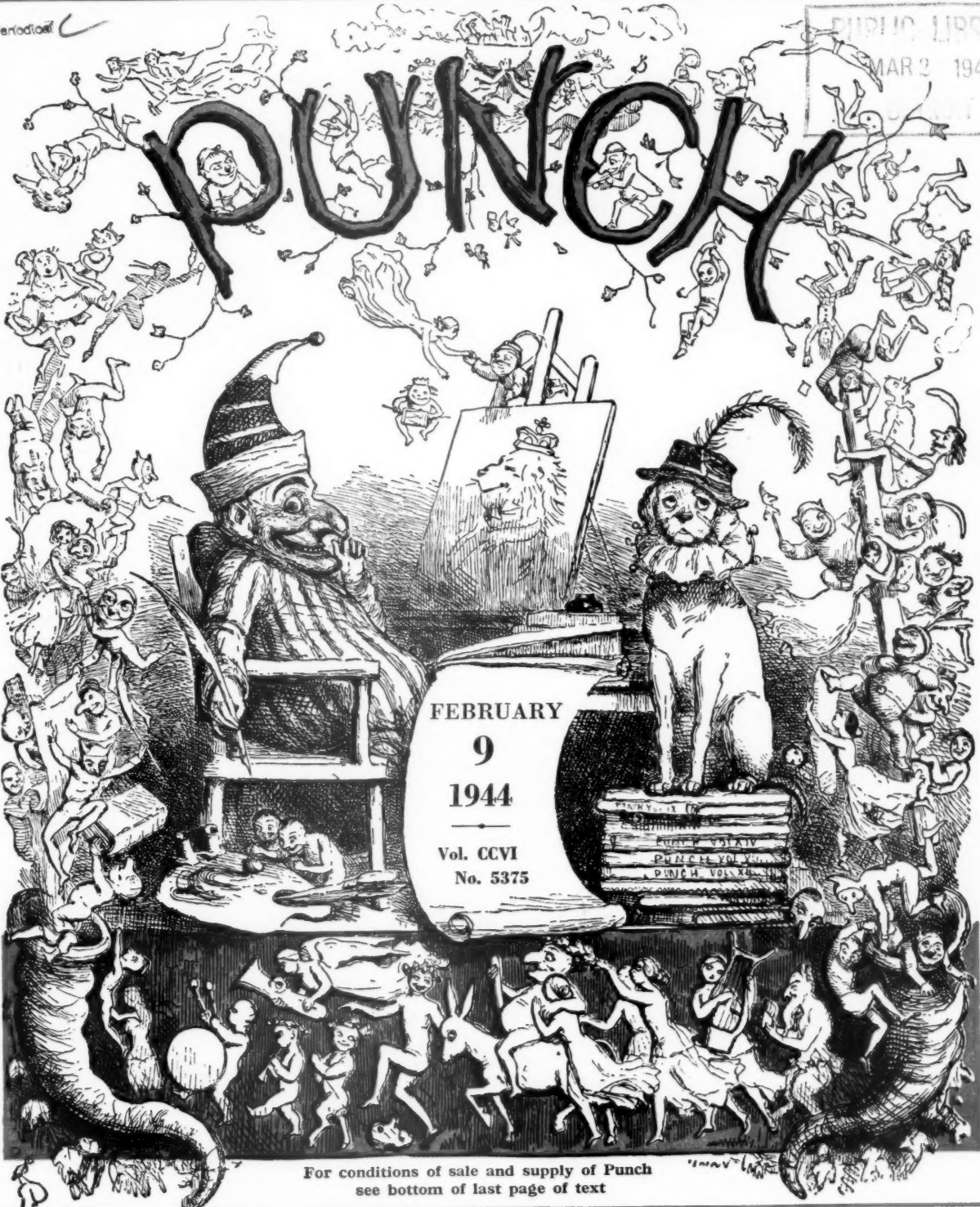
**DUNLOP**

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Periodical

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*I am the*  
Safety glass—**Triplex**  
Regd

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per tin.

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Health, Strength and Vitality

P583A

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—on the spot—"**

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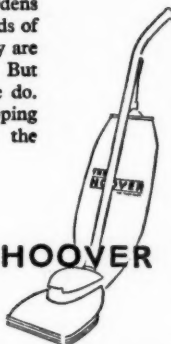


## The Hand that held the Hoover works the Lathe!

With no glamour of uniform, with all the burdens and responsibilities of running a home, thousands of housewives in 1944 are war-workers too. They are doing a double job. They get no medals for it. But if ever women deserved especial honour, these do. So to all war-workers who also tackle shopping queues, cooking, cleaning, mending and the hundred and one other household jobs

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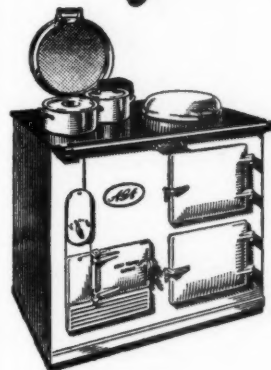


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DOMESTIC & INDUSTRIAL *Refrigeration*



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From all chemists at 2/- (inc. tax) per jar.

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FOR ALL SKIN TROUBLES

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Potter's Asthma Cure gives instant relief from coughing and chest tightness. The one remedy that enables you to carry on your occupation and regain those nights of restful sleep. Free from opiates. Does not affect the heart. Keep a tin of Potter's in the home against future attacks. Good for Croup, Hay Fever, Whooping Cough, etc.



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Ask your chemist's opinion of

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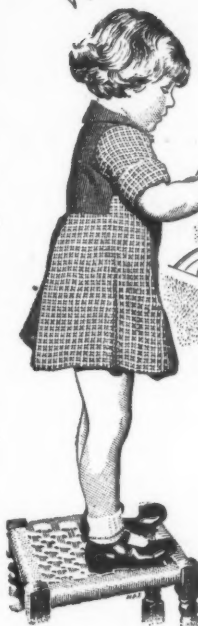
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**SENIOR'S**  
FISH & MEAT PASTES

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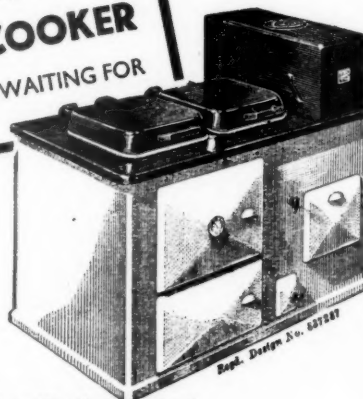
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The inevitable choice of pipe smokers of discrimination is Rattray's OLD GOWRIE. Here is a tobacco that has retained its pre-war quality and flavour—a tobacco that truly brings solace and enjoyment. Like all good things, its lasting qualities mean a wise economy in the end.

A customer writes from SCONE—"Rattray's tobacco in war-time must be reserved for special occasions and only for such time as one can concentrate upon its fine fragrance."

A customer writes from ALDERSHOT—"Your tobacco is a beautiful cured leaf indeed and grandly blended."

A customer writes from near AXMINSTER—"I find that your tobacco is economical, as it lasts so long, and is so much more enjoyable."

Obtainable only from

Chas. Rattray  
Tobacco  
Blender  
PERTH, SCOTLAND



Price: 48/- per lb., Post Paid.  
Send 12/6 for sample (1-lb. tin, Post Free).

## 'SANATOGEN'

Nerve Tonic may not be plentiful, but it is still obtainable. Ask your chemist for it: even if he cannot supply you immediately, he will be getting his share of 'SANATOGEN' at regular intervals, and will see that you get your share.

## 'SANATOGEN'

Regd. Trade Mark

NERVE TONIC

In one size only—6/6d.

A 'GENATUBAN' Product.





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*High Quality Biscuits*

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Abdulla for all lovers of  
the American style cigarette.

**Fifth Avenue . 20 for 2/4**

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*"There's  
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We never go short of a meal,  
with plenty of home-grown  
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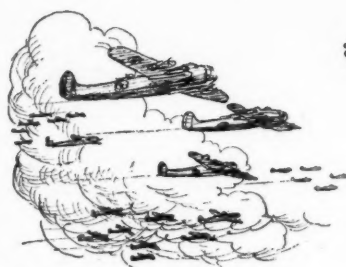
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Tailored by Simpson, makers of DAKS (Regd.)



# PUNCH

Or

*The London Charivari*



Vol. CCVI No. 5375

February 9 1944

## Charivaria

MADRID is rumoured to be so full of denials that General Franco is about to sack all his yes-men.

The latest country to show signs that it will not recognize the new Bolivian Government is Bolivia.

An unsuccessful novelist tells us that he has taken up farming. By hook or by crook he is determined to write for a living.

A leading politician of one small country states that in the event of peace his country will remain neutral.



**Daring Diplomatic Démarche**  
"OFFICIAL MOVES OVER BOMBS  
AMONG ORANGES"  
Heading in "Observer."

An M.P. says he will move heaven and earth to secure a new Brains Trust. When he has succeeded with heaven and earth his greatest problem will be the B.B.C.



A German poet recently wrote that all advance is illusion. We gather that Hitler has since made him a general.

A scientific writer predicts that cars of 1950 will run by magnetism. It takes a powerful lot of it to stop a taxi at present.

An Air Ministry official has told farmers that recent abnormal weather is not caused by gunfire. Nor by Mr. Hudson.

"The thrilling cavalry charge has been replaced by concentration of fire-power," says a military writer. As foxes recently realized.

The banquet recently thrown by Von Papen in Turkey is believed to have had as its object the allaying of the denials of the rumours it was intended to inspire.

So warm was it during a recent week-end that one enthusiastic naturalist almost heard the first cuckoo.

Thieves who broke into a second-hand store recently met with a bitter disappointment. Granted, the till was full, but the place had been stripped of everything of any value.

In view of the general strategic situation there is a feeling in military circles that if the invasion of France is delayed much longer our troops will be in danger of coming up against the spearhead of the elastic Nazi advance on Russia.

Certain colliery trainees complained of inadequate transport arrangements on their arrival recently. Apparently there were no means of conveying them to the nearest strike.



### Long-Felt-Want Corner

"John W— & Co. . . . send a wall calendar on which one can spot the date at a glance."—*Trade paper.*

Colonel McCormick, publisher of the anti-British isolationist *Chicago Tribune*, has revealed a plot by the British to invade America. It looks as if the Colonel believes everything he sees in the *Chicago Tribune*.

"The bridegroom's present to the bride was a large diamond cluster," says a newspaper. That's nothing. We heard the other day of a wealthy bridegroom who gave his bride a large bunch of flowers.



## Green-Print for Peace

**I**F Stalin has startled the Allied Powers by the sudden and painless birth of sixteen little independent Soviet Republics, he has but made a mild beginning on the road which I myself have envisaged for the post-war world.

This is, to put it briefly, Devolution All Round, or (in case you do not grasp the idea immediately) Devolution and yet more Devolution, and then Devolution again. The more you break up the ground the more fertile and fruitful it will be.

Russia was no doubt the best place, as Marshal Stalin (whom I have been advising) has realized, in which to start my plan; for she possesses one-sixth of the land surface of the globe. All that yellow stuff that you see at the right-hand end of civilization is hers, and even the German Fascist Armies did not bite very far into it. Speaking in terms of more territory, their indigestion began very soon, and Russia, whose name comes from a name which the Finns gave to a colony of Swedes on the Dnieper, is now ripe for a new political experiment. I have spoken of Russia as "she," and I suppose the unexpected arrival of sedecuplets fully entitles her to the feminine pronoun. But in fact the U.S.S.R. has a hundred and sixty-nine "ethnic groups" (a little more than there are in my block of flats at present), and if an "ethnic group" is not a suitable unit for independence, what is? Let Russia go on and let us all, making the most speed we can, follow after her.

My idea is to devolve every so-called nation more and more until the world consists of hundreds of thousands of autonomous villages, baby villages and toddling principalities, practising peasant crafts and arts in undisturbed prosperity. So instead of gathering a few great Powers together in one place to discuss the terms of peace we should gather an ever-increasing multitude of minor Powers until the ships, the railways, the hotels become too full to accommodate their envoys, and Geneva itself—if Geneva it must be—is too large for a single state and has in turn to be sub-divided.

Then the ambassadors could go home and be quiet.

My scheme (though Lord Halifax does not appear to agree with me as heartily as Mr. Mackenzie King) is a scientific one. It is to split the potential atom of war. America would naturally follow the lead of Russia and grant full independence to her forty-eight theoretically sovereign states. There would be countless Argentines and innumerable Bolivias. Unity is a mirage, and subdivision is Nature's rule. This is another of my political slogans, and men bearing placards with the words "Big Nations Unfair to Nature" will soon be parading the streets. The British Empire (already rather heterogeneous) will begin her reforms at home by granting complete autonomy to Scotland, Wales, Ulster, the Isle of Man, the Isle of Dogs and (to please the comedians, if nobody else) to Brighton and to Wigan. It is pleasant to think of the multitude of delegates making their pilgrimage to the City of Peace. Esquimaux and Laplanders, and witch-doctors from the heart of Africa, head-hunters and hill-billies and Kalmuks and deputies from the South Sea Islands and Yucatan. Glad I am that I have reserved the film rights for this colourful spectacle.

But it is only a beginning. The main advantage of my proposal is (as I have said) that very tiny nations do not readily make modern wars. One of them may have twenty more carbines and cutlasses than the next, but what if their neighbour has a few dozen hand-grenades or

a machine-gun hidden in the little wooden or stucco town hall?

How loth have always been the war lords of Panama to plunge the world into hostilities, and even Switzerland has for a long time been singularly unbellicose. Split into three parts (for a first trial) she would probably never produce a Hitler nor a Mussolini, nor dream of imperial conquests by land and sea, but I should hope for a time when every Swiss mountain had its own president, just as I look forward to a Rutland with at least two kings. Was not Brentford ruled by two?

Objections can be raised to my plan, but they are trivial. They will come mainly from business men who wish to supply us with thousands of commodities that we do not really need, like buttons and matches and motor-cars and colanders. In any case the goods that are not made in our own little community can be supplied to us by air-planes, and all customs barriers will be broken down. To the radio stations of the world I should allot autonomous republics of their own, and especially to the B.B.C.—"With us on the Brains Trust to-night we have the Emperor of Polperro, the Paramount Chief of Skipton, and the Lord High Provost of Llandrindod Wells."

You, in your heart, reader, are already enthusiastic about my Islands of the Blest. You know you are. You will be able to travel if you like. The air will be free. But you will prefer for the most part to stay at home quietly washing up and weaving your underwear. You will be on your Town Council, which will also be your Parliament responsible only to the City of Peace, and only to that until it lapses through overcrowding into desuetude.

The total population of an autonomous state in Germany will be about a hundred, and in Japan fifty. If they begin to convolve again they will be devolved by the armadas of a million united autonomous peoples from the sky.

Given over our signature in the Independent Republic of Mount Pleasant

EVOC.

## "We Who Have Husbands at Home . . ."

**W**E who have husbands at home should be very quiet, for we do not know the meaning of days, nor yet do we understand the hush of houses where in shadow go the unheard footsteps, the invisible faces of men.

Let us not speak too loudly of war restrictions and rationing and the black-out,

for there are eyes that seek empty horizons, skies and deserts and sad grey seas, and a sign from God, while we who have husbands at home look in the shops for wool perhaps, or cod.

Let us remember when we complain of the winter's cold, there are others here who have held in the moonless dark of a thousand nights the hand of fear, and have walked for years in desolate barren valleys where no flowers grow.

We who have husbands at home should be very quiet, for we do not know.

V. G.



### ARION AND THE DOLPHIN

"There was something or other in Spain  
That seemed to give Eden a pain,  
But this excellent fish  
Has appeared at my wish  
And I mean to be neutral again."



Sillence

"Mind ye—when we say BREETISH that includes the Sassenach."

## School Testimonial

*From Tyrrell and Tyrrell to the Headmaster*

**D**EAR SIR,—J. B. Smith Robinson, who has recently left your school, has applied to us for the post of Office Junior. We shall be obliged if you will let us have his school report.

Yours faithfully,

TYRRELL AND TYRRELL.

*From the Headmaster to Messrs. Tyrrell and Tyrrell*

DEAR SIR,—In reply to your letter, re J. B. Smith Robinson, I shall be glad if in future you will kindly quote the school number of candidates, as you will realize that they cannot all be known to me by name; moreover this will facilitate the search in my Statistics Book. For your information, this applicant's number is 1066.

### REPORT ON 1066 J. B. SMITH ROBINSON.

Has drunk 82½ gallons of grade A milk, 18½ gallons of orange juice, and eaten 1923 meals. His weight and height have been supervised throughout, and the increase has been normal. Objected to orange juice at first, but became reconciled. He has picked 3 cwt. of blackberries for the school canteen, 17 cwt. of horse chestnuts in connection with the scheme formulated by a well-known firm of dentrifice manufacturers, and 5 cwt. of acorns. The amounts picked each year are in proportion to his increasing years. 1066 has collected 5 tons of salvage and has been given a badge, which in turn is now required for salvage, also 2 fur. 5 chns. 18 yds. of books. He has knitted 7 pullovers, 60 scarves, 21 pairs of mittens for the Merchant Navy Comforts Fund. He has been absent for 69 sessions to help the local farmer with my permission, and another 16 with his own permission. He has saved

£23 through the School Savings Bank although I regret that owing to his frequent withdrawals he has never been in credit more than 2s. He has killed and skinned 72 rabbits belonging to the School Rabbit Club, and has air-dried and dressed the skins. For this he has received a badge. During the last two years he has been supplied with 40 supplementary clothing coupons because his weight exceeds 7 st. 12 lb., or the size of his footwear is greater than 5½, or his height exceeds 5 ft. 3 ins.

Now, in return for this information, I shall be grateful if you will fill in on the enclosed slip, ref. 1066, your opinion of his educational attainment. Nothing elaborate is required. Just a few lines on his Arithmetic, Reading and Writing, or if you notice that he is good at any particular subject, and why. This will enable me to complete his dossier, and inform any of my Staff who may be interested.

Yours faithfully,

M. JONES (Headmaster).



## Snipped Off Trousers Turn-Ups Allegation

Mr. Dalton Under Fire in Commons

**MR. CLUTCH** (Soc., East Barley). Is the President of the Board of Trade aware that the decision to reverse the policy on "austerity suits" has caused grave concern in certain quarters, and is it not a fact that the explanation advanced for this decision—namely, that it was taken in conformity with and even at the instance of the War Office—represents a dangerous intrusion of military busybodydom into the sphere of civil liberties?

**MR. DALTON** (President of the Board of Trade). *The answer to the first part of the question is, No. The second part of the question rests upon a misconception of the circumstances attending the decision referred to.*

**MR. CLUTCH.** Is the Minister aware that it is now freely rumoured in taverns, coffee-houses and in a certain section of the Press that the decision was in fact taken as the result of a visit to his (the Minister's) house of two qualified tailors, by name Mr. Snip and Mr. Herringbone?

**MR. DALTON.** *I have no control over what is freely rumoured in taverns or coffee-houses. That part of the question which deals with the Press should be referred to the Minister of Information.*

**MR. CLUTCH.** Is it not a fact that Mr. Snip and Mr. Herringbone forced their way into the Minister's private residence disguised as members of the Chinese Good-will Mission, that they found the Minister at breakfast wearing a pre-war suit, and by menacing him with scissors forced him to rise abruptly from the table; that Mr. Snip cut off the turn-ups of the Minister's trousers while Mr. Herringbone was engaged in removing the flaps of his jacket-pockets and slicing a number of buttons off the extremities of his coat-sleeves? Is the Minister aware that Mr. Herringbone then stepped round behind the Minister and, inserting a hand under the Minister's coat, pulled away a large piece of good quality lining, bursting the Minister's coat open at the front by the violence of his actions and thus affording his associate Snip an opportunity to carve out two of the Minister's waistcoat-pockets? And does he deny that at this juncture he made use of a term of reproach to the man Snip, whereupon Snip retaliated by covering what was left of the Minister's waistcoat with chalk-marks?

**MR. DALTON.** *That does not arise out of the original question. (Cries of "Answer.")*

**MR. CLUTCH.** Is it not a fact, moreover, that Mr. Herringbone, who acted throughout with rather more restraint and decorum than Mr. Snip, then made use of the expression "Now, then!" and gathering together the pieces of material made available by their joint efforts, rapidly stitched them up into a handy reticule, with button fastenings, which, he explained, it had been his firm's custom to sell to purchasers of austerity suitings in order to make up for the shortage of pockets; that he then cried out in a low voice "Cui bono?" and bending a look of considerable severity upon the Minister, folded his arms and waited, as this House does, for an answer?

**MR. DALTON.** *The Hon. Member had better ask Mr. Herringbone.*

*(A Voice. Is this Russia?)*

**SIR GEORGE SHOELACE** (Cons., S. Castor). Is the Minister aware of the warm regard in which he is held by all sections of this House, and will he take steps to safeguard himself against the violence of disgruntled tailors and the no less vicious attacks of mischief-making Hon. Members? *(Cheers.)*

**MR. DALTON.** *I am grateful to the Hon. Member and to the House for their encouragement, and I am glad to take this opportunity of making a personal statement on my relations with the tailoring world. While it is true that delegations have from time to time waited upon me and have indeed favoured me with practical demonstrations of their skill in the economical cutting of cloth, I desire to repudiate in the strongest terms the suggestion that such visits have in any instance taken place at breakfast-time, or that the arguments of the delegates have been reinforced by the severance of portions of my own clothing. Neither a Mr. Snip nor a Mr. Herringbone have, so far as I am aware, been included in any such delegation.*

*I should like to add that my visitors have at all times conducted themselves as bespoke tailors should.*

**A MEMBER.** Do you mean to say that the incident referred to by the Hon. Member for East Barley never took place at all?

**MR. DALTON.** *That is what I have been attempting to make clear.*

**A MEMBER.** Then why couldn't you say so at once?

There was no reply.

H. F. E.

## Alaska Highway

**C**OME along the Highway! Here's the road to end the war—  
Retribution's entry, by the Trail of 'Ninety-eight,  
Roaring through the yellow dust that turns a trucker sore,  
Over scrub where bears and moose roamed happily before,  
Driving on from camp to camp with Liberty for freight!

Come along the Highway! It's a life-line for Free Man,  
Joining all the airports of the great unmastered West,  
Rolling up to Whitehorse, where the bad old days began,  
Wound into a whirling noose to fling around Japan,  
Looped across the Soldier's Summit—on from crest to crest!

Come along the Highway! There are chasms, dropping sheer . . .

Camp Canol sits grimly in a stretch of muskeg sea;  
Few escapists linger to absorb the landscape here;  
This is where the diesel tractors dive and disappear  
Down to the eternal ice below the blackened scree.

Come along the Highway! In the blue-eyed Yukon vale  
Pebbled streams trip gaily where the ore smiles yet unpanned.

Those who ride to Skagway by the winding White Pass rail  
Call the line "Wait Patiently"—for some jokes never stale  
Even in Alaska, with new destinies at hand. . . .

Come along the Highway—on a truck to Dawson Creek!  
Ride again to Fairbanks—sixteen hundred miles along!  
Take a drive to Norman Wells—and, if you find that bleak,  
Travel the Mackenzie route for desolation's peak! . . .

Come along the Highway—

Or above it, by the skyway!

There's the road to victory, to which I sing my song!

## The Sight-seers

THE telephone-bell rang. I was obliged to admit the urgency of the request. To have no help was the common lot, and it must be nearly a week now since she moved in, she was lucky to have got the painters at all, one really could manage easily without hot water, and surely she knew how to mend fuses. But at the mention of a temperature of 103° I gave in. I would take them out. . . .

The three children scrambled to open the front door. Would I, they demanded, take them to Madame Tussaud's, to a news-reel, in the tram which dived dramatically underground and stopped at two stations before it came up again, up and down the moving staircase at Hartridges, to count the guns in the park, to feed the ducks illegally on the Serpentine.

I put my fingers in my ears; I would choose myself.

Their faces fell. They knew about grown-ups and expected an instructive and chilly tour of the statues of London, or a nice walk.

"We'll go to the top of St. Paul's," I said.

As the applause died down I began to regret my bravado. Would I, I wondered, wilt by the way?

"Or shall we . . ." I began, but there was no reprieve. I was for it.

We managed to board an Eleven, but there was no choice but to clamber awkwardly to the top. No doubt it was good practice. At what age did one begin to favour the inside of buses? Like wanting to go to bed, it must mark the end of childhood.

We swayed down the King's Road and swung giddily round Sloane Square as the children began to play "What wouldn't be there if it wasn't for the war." We wouldn't count bombed houses or sandbags, but in spite of a grey fire-engine, an advertisement of a Squander Bug on the Nelson Column, and the barbed wire in Whitehall, my side won with ninety-four jeeps and a woman carrying a gas-mask . . . "I expect she keeps her handkerchief in it, or string."

"We are all supposed to carry them," I said sententiously.

Arrived at St. Paul's, there was a stampede up the steps. The pigeons, startled for a moment by the rude invasion, fluttered away a few feet. It was strange to be sight-seeing at home, stranger when sights have been so long obliterated by the fogs of war.

"What does 'unctuous piety' mean?"

"And 'exemplary'?"

Only by the threat of being too late for the dome did I drag them from the monuments, for children, as the poor, are not ashamed to admit the fascination of the grave.

The pink coil of tickets, the gazing crowd, the guide-books; for a moment one was abroad again.

The children danced up the shallow winding steps, running down again like puppies, regardless of the three hundred odd to come, until with a sudden turn a guide was monotonously hurrying us into the Whispering Gallery. The floor was worn with the feet of pilgrims, the wall above the benches dark where they had laid their oily heads to listen.

"Isn't it marvellous?" I hissed into a mop of hair.

"What is? I can't hear a word he says."

Once more the laid-on phenomenon had failed to impress. The children had left their seats and were pressing their faces against the railings. "Look, that's where we were, right down there."

"They really *do* look like ants."

"Isn't it absolutely lovely!"

But the guide was not concerned with beauty. His department was sights, and that we should not miss them his determination.

"Hurry along there, please."

And we dipped our heads once more into the darkness.

The stairs had narrowed. A couple of girls passed us, giggling and pushing one another; a string of boys, their antics controlled from behind by a curate; a couple of airmen—a mild busman's holiday indeed it must be for them.

We reached the Stone Gallery, and through a little door stepped outside. The great dome still rose above us, a chalky parapet ringed the wide path of lead on which we stood.

"Do you think it will all fall down if we jump?"

"Like a house of cards."

"Don't, please—don't try," I said anxiously.

It seemed impossible such frail and tranquil beauty should have withstood the blast of the *Luftwaffe*, a puff of wind must blow it away. Their heads were through the balustrade.

"Where's the bombing?"

"You said we could see all the worst part."

"It isn't awful at all."

Below lay London. The winter sun had burst out and turned the havoc

to order. An architect's model for a fairy king! Cast in white clay, the shadows painted grey, smoothly it stretched until the lines faded and the golden river plunged into the fog.

"Can we go home on the top of a bus?"

In an incredibly short time we were on the pigeons' steps once more. They took no notice of us. Perhaps we had learnt better manners, or, like the weathered Londoners they were, after the first impact they cared nothing for the invaders, for treading softly on our toes, they brushed by as intent on their occasions as if we did not exist.

## Booby Traps

"SUMP," snaps the O.C., "I'm making you Booby Traps Officer. H.Q., R.A.S.C., want every man trained by 0815 hours on the 17th, so get cracking. Put on a demonstration this afternoon."

"Sir," I reply, "it shall be done. But I would point out that I am also Education, Entertainment, Messing, Salvage, Sports and Swill Officer, not to mention (as they say) H.Q. Platoon Officer. Furthermore, it is now 1045 hours on the 15th and there are 430 men to train by the time stated, of whom 35 men will not return from leave until the 19th. Again, I have had nothing to do with booby traps since my father came into the school-room out of turn and received the contents of a quart jug which I had intended for my young brother."

All this, of course, I say to the Second in Command, Captain Towrope. It would have been wasted on the O.C.

"Don't forget you're Orderly Officer to-day," mutters Towrope between phone calls. "And remember, if you blow anything up you pay the barrack damages yourself."

I try another line of attack.

"Can I use Sergeant Wheelbrace, Corporal Shovel or Corporal Scrim? They've passed as instructors in Mines and Booby Traps."

He peers at his board.

"Sorry, old boy. Wheelbrace is on Compassionate, Shovel's on Agricultural and Scrim is being posted to-day."

I decide to rely as usual on Bonnet, my batman-driver.

By 1115 we have collected from a reluctant C.Q.M.S. a load of trip-wires, trap-wires, detonators, fuses and other

Fargasse



"Listen, Jane—



I've found out the date of—



you know what.

lethal devices, also several highly explosive packages, which Bonnet, who once spent six weeks on ammunition duties, bangs about with irritating nonchalance.

By 1145 we have discovered how everything works, at a very moderate cost in barrack damages—15s. 6d., I estimate.

At 1149 hours Bonnet drops a box of guncotton right at my feet. I blink and decide this is enough. Surreptitiously emptying a box marked GELIGNITE, I fill it again with coal-dust, a small charge and a complicated fuse of my own invention. The results are very gratifying when Bonnet, finding the box in his way, kicks it aside. The air is dark with dust and profanity for several minutes, after which he handles everything with exaggerated care and an air of thoughtfulness.

We now have to work at speed, but by 1459 hours we are all set, and at 1500 hours the show opens with a bang when I ask Private Plug to hand me the box of chalk. Plug retires to his seat with a hurt look, but the audience is now definitely interested.

I proceed with my talk, wondering when the O.C. will choose to come in. He has a flair for picking the worst possible moment. However, I feel nothing can go wrong this time.

By now we have reached the high spot of the show.

Bonnet is doing his act. With Cockney zest and heavy pantomime he is playing the part of an untrained and unwary soldier detailed to search a billet recently vacated by some more than usually ingenious Nazis.

He can do no right. Everything he

touches goes up in smoke or shatters our eardrums. The audience is enraptured.

He hears his finale. This is going to go over big. Dazed and exhausted by his efforts, he is scheduled to collapse into an innocent-looking chair, which will at once disintegrate to the accompaniment of the biggest explosion yet and a heavy fall of white lime from the roof directly overhead.

Suddenly I perceive the O.C. has entered by the side door. His dignified figure is making its way to the front and—a chill settles on my spine—is making for the fatal chair. He is only two steps from it. I wave frantically to him and to Bonnet. Neither pays the least attention. Meanwhile the whole room has seen the O.C., and a respectful silence stiffens it.

I shudder. The O.C. has no sense of humour at all. I cover my eyes. But nothing happens and I catch my breath. Can it be a dud? Or did Bonnet bungle the wiring? It was one of those I hadn't time to check.

I pull myself together and find the O.C. staring at me curiously as he settles himself in the chair. Bonnet appears to have made the best of the situation and is cheerfully bowing right and left to considerable applause.

I hurry through my stuff. In a rousing peroration I state that anyone who falls for a booby trap after this is a complete boob, deserves anything he gets, and ought to go on a charge as well.

I salute the O.C. and lift my great-coat off the peg. Instantly there is a crash like a blockbuster from just outside the window and I stagger back as a cloud of white dust pours down on me.

Wiping my eyes, I see the entire audience—except the O.C.—rolling about in ecstasy. Bonnet's grinning face disappears round the door.



Unfortunately I'm sworn to the most frightful secrecy—



so you'll just have to guess at it—



and I'll tell you when you guess wrong."

The fact that goods made of raw materials in short supply owing to war conditions are advertised in this paper should not be taken as an indication that they are necessarily available for export.





"Any complaints in this 'ut—apart from a leaky roof, no 'ot of water, a couple o' dud bulbs an' a broken winder?"

## The Battle of the Headlines

**H**OLD back, sub-editor! You march and plan  
So much more swiftly than the soldiers can.  
They take a trench or two, a few-score scalps,  
But your white arrows are across the Alps.  
Even a tank must sometimes pause for fuel,  
But you fly onward, twice as quick and cruel.  
I know, it's easy to imagine "traps"  
And super-Stalingrads on small-scale maps.  
What is a river, or a mountain-crag?  
They are not marked. So Fritz is "in the bag".  
In the Crimea—do the Germans know?—  
They "faced annihilation" long ago.  
I can't recall when you announced the kill;  
I know they face annihilation still.  
If all the Huns had met a horrid end  
That you've "enveloped" in the Dnieper Bend,  
Or pronged at Tarnopol or Krivoi Rog,  
Or caught with pincers in the Pripet bog,  
We might stop talking of the Second Front—  
There would not be another Hun to hunt.  
Desist, headliner, from your wild advance,  
And let the front-line fellow have a chance.  
Lay off, brave scribe; for, when he does prevail,  
We hardly notice it—the news is stale.

A. P. H.

## H. J.'s Dramatic Fragments

**T**HE following fragment arouses poignant memories in me because I composed it while teaching my wife to swim. She had a theory that what made it difficult for people was having so many novelties all at once, so she worked out a schedule adding one novelty a week. To begin with, she just sat about in a bathing-dress. Then she added water-wings, these stages being fairly easy as they did not interfere with housework. Next, she introduced a good-deal of seaweed into her life, especially in bed, but being of a rather volatile disposition she never completed the next phase, which consisted of walking about in a rock garden with bare feet.

### HOUNDSDITCH HOY!

(The scene is the front hall of the Royal Palace during history.)

**LORD BOHUN.** I wonder what Anne of Cleves will send as a wedding present this time. By the way, you had better book a place on Tower Hill at the same time as you accept the invitation; there's bound to be a rush.

**LORD MOHUN.** Every time there's less to drink. At the last wedding I had only half a glass of cooking sack. When I did manage to get hold of a goblet of brandy the Fool set light to it before I had a sip.

Enter the COURT JESTER

**LORD BOHUN.** I hope you remember not to make jokes about mothers-in-law.

**COURT JESTER.** It's very difficult. The King has sent a memorandum saying that he wants my jokes to be topical, but with all these changes in the Church going on I have to read theology for ten hours a day to keep up to date.

**LORD MOHUN.** Must it be patter? Surely card-tricks are safer.

## PUNCH HOSPITAL COMFORTS FUND

(Registered under the War Charities Act, 1940.)

### AUDITORS' CERTIFICATE

We have audited the books of the PUNCH HOSPITAL COMFORTS FUND for the year ended 31st December 1943, with the vouchers relating thereto.

We certify that the whole of the expenses of administering the Fund have been defrayed by the Proprietors of PUNCH and that all payments made from the Fund have been for the purchase of materials for distribution.

(Sgd.) J. H. HUGILL & Co.

101 Leadenhall Street, London, E.C.3.

25th January, 1944.

Chartered Accountants,  
Hon. Auditors.

Mr. Punch would like to take this opportunity of thanking all Subscribers to his Fund. Their great generosity has made it possible to send large quantities of warm materials for making up into comforts, not only for British men and women, but also for the men and women of the Allies. There is an immense amount still to do and more money is urgently needed. Donations will be gratefully received and acknowledged by Mr. Punch at PUNCH COMFORTS FUND, 10 Bouverie St., London, E.C.4.



"In private life he's a major."

COURT JESTER. My predecessor invited the King to pick the lady.

*Enter the GHOST of Julius Cæsar*

GHOST. Excuse me, but can anyone tell me a good cure for baldness?

COURT JESTER. Nettles.

GHOST. Thanks muchly.

[Exit

*Enter CATHARINE PARR*

CATHARINE PARR. This is going to be fun. When I was a little girl I always wanted to be an explorer, but my family stopped me, and I was beginning to think there was no opportunity for a woman of spirit, except boar-hunting. I am looking forward to coming to grips with the family. I want to bring them altogether and have some really jolly romps.

*Enter DR. JOHN DUBB*

DR. JOHN DUBB. How is His Majesty to-day?

CATHARINE PARR. Bluffish.

LORD MOHUN. I will tactfully change the conversation. Ah, if only these portraits round the walls could talk! *(The portraits take the hint.)*

PORTRAIT OF WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR. If you want to know why I am angry, it is because I am thinking of the Battle of Hastings and the perfectly frightful marksmanship of my archers. However much I told them to aim low they just would shoot their arrows into the air.

PORTRAIT OF KING ALFRED. Hounded and dogged is what I am. Why does everyone pick on me just because I was suffering from indigestion and tried to make a few charcoal biscuits?

PORTRAIT OF ROBERT BRUCE. That spider spinning threads out of its entrails gave me the idea for my bon mot, "An Army Marches on its Stomach."

PORTRAIT OF KING JOHN. I should never have agreed to Magna Charta if I had known, but they told me it was just a receipt.

*(Noting that nobody is paying the slightest attention to them, the portraits relapse into a dignified gloom.)*

*Enter a HERMIT*

HERMIT. I am about to prophesy. I see a bubble. It is a South Sea Bubble. It bursts, toil and trouble being so caused. I now see something else. I see one F. Nightingale who has a lamp. One T. Edison appears with a better lamp. Yet another, H. Morrison this time, won't have anything to do with lamps at all. I say, I really am in form to-night, aren't I? *[Exit, after a cold pause]*

LORD BOHUN. What's this trouble among Beefeaters about?

CATHARINE PARR. It's the new scheme. They are changing their name to the Yeomen of the Guard and feeding them on green salads.

*Enter HERNE THE HUNTER*

HERNE. If anyone else calls me Dracula I shall resign. By the way, I shall be bringing my spectral band to the feast.

CATHARINE PARR. I had better see that a special table is reserved for them. It's not really fair to pair them with the other guests; they do gibber so as they eat.

HERNE. It's their job.

*Enter the CHIEF COOK, beaming*

CHIEF COOK. I have finished the wedding cake. It has six candles, and "Many Happy Returns" picked out in walnuts.

CATHARINE PARR. !!!

FINIS





"... and the selection from 'Carmen' will be followed by a talk on stockbreeding."

### "If You Were a Bus-Conductress . . ."

If you were a bus-conductress  
And I were a twopenny fare,  
My love, it would be my heart's warmest delight  
To travel beside you from morning till night  
And follow you everywhere;  
I'd wait in a queue  
The whole day through  
For the chance of a fleeting encounter with you—  
If you were a bus-conductress  
And I were a twopenny fare.

If you were a land-girl, beloved,  
And I were a farmer's boy,  
We'd wander alone through the stubble and roots  
With love in our eyes and the mud on our boots  
And none to intrude on our joy:  
The turnip and beet,  
Politely discreet,  
Would feign not to notice the touch of our feet  
As we passed them . . . if you were a land-girl  
And I were a farmer's boy.

If you were a station announcer  
And I were catching a train,  
I'd listen entranced to your voice's sweet tone  
And fancy you murmured to me all alone  
Some fond sentimental refrain;  
I shouldn't much mind  
If I were to find  
That the train had to leave me (see posters) behind—  
If you were a station announcer  
And I were catching a train.

If you were an A.T.S. Redcap  
And I were a private on leave,  
I'd woo you, my love, as my heart's dearest prize,  
And beg you (or *should* I?) with tears in my eyes  
My passionate vows to receive. . . .  
No . . . I frankly declare,  
Were you never so fair,  
I think I should probably run like a hare  
If you were an A.T.S. Redcap  
And I were a private on leave.





**A DOMESTIC EVENT**

"Sixteen, Comrade! All boys."

## Impressions of Parliament

### Business Done

**Tuesday, February 1st.**—House of Commons: Electoral Reform Discussed.

**Wednesday, February 2nd.**—House of Commons: As Above, Again.

**Thursday, February 3rd.**—House of Commons: Snappiness.

**Tuesday, February 1st.**—Anyone whose duty it is to be in constant attendance on the House knows that Ministers are sometimes (if this does not offend one of our 10,000 Defence Regulations) distinctly liverish. It is also well known that Back-benchers take this lying down, turn the other cheek, and generally behave as good Back-benchers should.

But to-day all that was changed. The Ministers got snapped—and the Back-benchers did the snapping. The Ministers did all the "gently-does-it" stuff, the Back-benchers the pinching and punching that, even in so august a body as the High Court of Parliament, seems to be inseparable from the first day of the month.

Most curious of all was the fact that Mr. CHURCHILL himself seemed to be leading this new appeasement policy. He had, over the week-end, sent to the Government candidate in the by-election at Brighton a letter that referred to his opponent in terms far removed from appeasement. Yet, to-day, he was fairly loaded with honeyed words, which he handed round with a fine disregard for Party boundaries.

Mr. HUGH DALTON, President of the Board of Trade, who also has (and not infrequently uses) a rough side to his tongue, positively gushed politeness and suavity. Sir JAMES GRIGG, the War Minister, whose offensive armour is as complete as—let us say—the British Army's, let pass several Back-bench whizzbangs that would normally certainly have led to a considerable explosion.

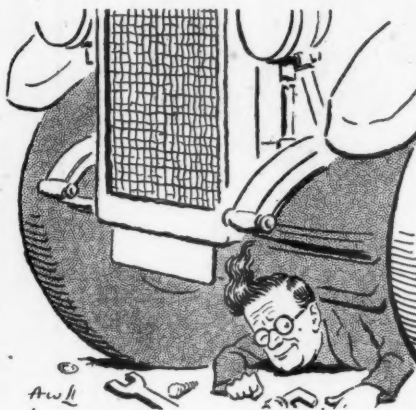
On the other side of the picture gentle creatures like Mr. TOM DRIBERG, Mrs. JENNIE ADAMSON and Mr. SAMUEL STOREY seemed to be doing their best to emulate the tough guys of the films.

And in the interests of truth and history (in that order) it ought to be recorded that they made a very creditable job of it.

To Mr. DRIBERG Sir JAMES GRIGG is like a red—or, as it doubtless seems to him, very, very blue—rag to a bull. So when the (extremely) Independent Member for Maldon asked a question about some alleged elections in Italy

Sir JAMES replied with unwonted, indeed, almost unrecognizable mildness. Mr. DRIBERG, on the other hand, was definitely tart—and war-time, sugarless tart, at that—telling the Minister he was humiliated and misled by his subordinates.

Scarce was this interlude over, than mild Mrs. JENNIE ADAMSON upped and told off Mr. DALTON for "capitulating" to men over the austerity suits. Why not, she demanded, make some concessions to women? Mr. DALTON, forcing a smile to his lips, replied that "women had been much more reasonable, and less conservative, than men in these matters," and he thanked them. Bowed, too!



OVERHAULING THE PARLIAMENTARY BUS

"This matter has to be considered in two parts—first the machinery. . . ."

*The Home Secretary on Electoral Reform.*

This floored the critic, even if it made some of the Conservatives (with a capital "C") finger their chins a bit doubtfully, suspecting a double entendre. The friendly beams had hardly faded ere Mr. SAMUEL STOREY leaped in with a question about alarm clocks. Mr. DALTON replied, honey dripping from his words.

Mr. STOREY crisply retorted that Mr. DALTON ought to get himself an alarm clock with which to wake himself from his dream of controlling the sleeping, as well as the waking, hours of us all! Very cutting (or alarming) it was, and everybody expected the President to register emotion. But no, he merely smiled and hoped his honourable friend (that was what he said) had an alarm clock of his own and was happy with it, or something of that sort.

Those who favour the "clear fire and the rigour of the game" hoped for better things when Mr. CHURCHILL himself stepped into the arena.

He had to answer the sort of question he normally knocks to the boundary: "What principles will be applied in determining the date of the end of the war." He got up and gazed in silence at the questioner for fifteen seconds. Hopes rose. Then he spoke, expressing the view that "no doubt at some time hostilities will cease in the various theatres of war," but gently declining the task of fixing the date of the war's end. Hopes fell.

And so it went on, with Ministers turning the other cheek and Back-benchers giving it the most mighty swipes with a regularity that almost became monotonous. Mr. DALTON apologetically told Mr. VERNON BARTLETT that Servicemen get twice as many razor-blades as do civilians, and was threatened by that always immaculately-shaven Member that if something were not done about civilians he would appear in a "large bushy beard."

The President shuddered a little, but offered no comment.

Led by Mr. HERBERT MORRISON, the Home Secretary, the House went on to discuss a proposal that Mr. Speaker should preside over an all-Party conference to consider the redistribution of Parliamentary seats, cheaper elections, and reforms of the franchise. Gladstone had admitted, said the Home Secretary, that he did not understand "Proportional Representation"—invariably referred to by the affectionate diminutive "P.R."—but added hastily that the House had gone a long way since then, and clearly knew all about it. He was seen to be panting; he had very nearly said something not quite polite to the House.

Sir HERBERT WILLIAMS, whose personal aversion to Press publicity is notorious, complained that the Press sometimes mentioned that M.P.s did not attend their Parliamentary duties and had too long holidays. The hundred or so M.P.s present cheered these sentiments before they hurried off to—wherever M.P.s go to.

The debate drifted on until it was adjourned to the morrow.

To the general approval Sir JAMES GRIGG announced a special organization to ensure that the art treasures of Italy were to be protected by Allied troops in their march to victory.

**Wednesday, February 2nd.**—They were at it again to-day. Hardly had the House met than (normally) mild



“... and I think your archers are wonderful!”

soft-spoken Mr. “BILL” ASTOR fairly flew at Mr. BRENDAN BRACKEN, the Minister of Information. It seemed that the Minister (or his deputy) had at some time promised that something should be done about something. To-day Mr. BRACKEN said he was unable to be specific about dates for the honouring of that promise.

BILL ASTOR's eyes gleamed. “Then will you issue a glossary of the meaning of words used by your Department?” he roared, in best Drury Lane style.

“B.B.,” who had not been present on the previous day and therefore presumably did not know about this game of “Hunt-the-Minister,” gasped aloud. Then his eyes gleamed. He asked in return for a glossary of Mr. ASTOR's judgments, and pointed out that such a term as “as quickly as possible” was, in war-time, highly conditional and really meant what it said. So there!

Even Lady ASTOR, hurling herself into the fray in defence of her son, did not escape unscathed. She demanded to know how it was that a Ministry had to wait its turn for paper and printing, while “hundreds and hundreds” of pamphlets had descended

on the luckless heads of Members over the Education Bill.

“Because,” snapped a Labour man, “some of you need it!”

In the subsequent mêlée Mr. BRACKEN, having achieved the aim of all directors of political warfare and got his enemies fighting among themselves, sat back with a satisfied smile. It seemed as if he had broken the spell, and that the Massacre of the Ministers had ended, when (wonders will surely never cease!) Mr. ELLIS SMITH had a good hard go, with Mr. DUNCAN SANDYS as his victim.

Now, the strange and curious thing about all this is that Mr. ELLIS SMITH is so devoted an admirer of the Government that he is reputed to keep a group portrait of the War Cabinet under his pillow. And Mr. SANDYS is surely the most polite and suave of all Ministers. So when Mr. ELLIS SMITH got rough, people began to think that things really were happening. Mr. Speaker, with his firm but velvet-gloved hand, intervened, and peace reigned again.

To the intense interest of a number of United States and Dominion soldiers in the Gallery the House proceeded to

its sessional gamble. Working in perfect unison, that well-known firm of bookmakers, Sir GILBERT CAMPION, Mr. “ERIC” METCALFE and Major EDWARD FELLOWES (in public life Clerks of the House), drew lucky numbers out of a box, and the winners will have the right to move motions when Departmental Estimates come to be debated later on.

The rest of the day was given to electoral reform once more, Mr. ARTHUR GREENWOOD opening with one of those thoughtful and well-balanced speeches which make him one of the best speakers in the House. Apart from a contribution from Sir PERCY HARRIS, for the Liberals, which showed an equal grip of the highly technical subject, the debate was unexciting and hardly worth the distinction of having Mr. ANTHONY EDEN himself to wind it up.

Thursday, February 3rd.—Ministers and Members improved on things to-day by snapping at each other, ably led in this by Mr. CHURCHILL himself, who seemed not to be particularly pleased with things. However, he did not stay long. Nor, for that matter, did many other Members of the House.



## What a Word!

["Westminster City Council's rat-catcher is in future to be called Rodent Officer. His salary has been increased from £4 17s. 0d. to £5 10s. 0d. a week."—*Evening Standard*]

THIS announcement has caused a good many repercussions in "Whitehall circles". What, by the way, is a Whitehall "circle"? Do "Government personnel" never respond to repercussions except at round tables—or the big circular bar in Street? Surely no one is thinking of a "Ring"—for a "Ring", we all know, is a bad thing, almost as vicious as a cartel or vested interest. I noted, again by the way, the other day, that some polemic person announced that he would see the Beveridge Plan through in spite of the opposition of "the insurance companies, the doctors, and other vested interests". So now the poor "doctors" are "vested interests". Well, but this is very odd. Surely, as regards, or in respect of, medical treatment, the doctors are "the workers": and it is well known (a) that the workers should have at least a strong, if not the only, say, in the management of their industries, and (b) that "the workers" are never vested interests. But when the poor doctors attempt a small say in their industry they are vested interests. If my gastrocnemius muscle (starboard side) keeps me in bed much longer I may at last have time to complete my monograph on *Vested Interests*, with an *Appendix on the Act to Restore Trade Union Restrictions* after the war. Also my brochure on bottlenecks, entitled *A Bottleneck to End Bottlenecks*.

But let us return to Mr. Hopper.

One question which is causing a substantial percentage of repercussions, back-clangs and cymbal-noises is: Has Mr. Hopper a cause of action for libel? Is it defamatory to describe an officer as a "rodent"? I think not. I have never known why it was considered such a contemptuous epithet when applied to rats, mice, etc. There is no dictionary in this bed; but my recollection is that "rodent" merely means "biting", and in my experience all animals bite, except those which have a low tooth-content. Horses and dogs, I should have said, are clear cases of "rodents". And we are entitled to assume that Mr. Hopper has a tooth or two, and does a little biting at lunch-time, if he can get in anywhere. So I don't think that the Westminster Council need be much afraid of a writ.

But then, say Government personnel in low rotatory whispers: "Where is

all this leading us? What is the long-term issue?" The short-term issue is evident. Mr. Hopper has improved his status, as well as his salary. No longer a mean rat-catcher, he is a Rodent Officer, and is thirteen shillings to the good per man-week, reckoned of course on the Rainham Scale (it is not stated whether there is to be an Individual Rodent Bonus or a Global Accretion for Rats in Bulk). But—here is the gnawing—I beg your pardon, rodent-anxiety: "Is this the first rung, or perhaps spoke, in a Cycle of Status Inflation?" The odious term "scavenger" is no longer heard to-day. The honourable "street-cleaner" has taken its place. But suppose that Mr. Hopper's *coup* puts ideas into the heads of the street-cleaners? There may be a Street-Cleaners' Drive for Status, at the end of which they will be called Traffic Decontaminators, Artery Ablutionists, or—who knows?—Thoroughfare Therapists. And then, of course, their salaries will rise. They will be followed by those good fellows the municipal dustmen, who may well demand a more dignified title—Refuse Expert or Domestic Surplus Remover. Teachers (whose status certainly should be improved) will become Education Experts, Instructionists, or Mind Developers, and firemen Anti-conflagration Officers.

Up will go the municipal wages-bill on a nation-wide curve. Then the non-municipal toilers will follow. Engine-drivers will be content with nothing less than Locomotive Directors, and porters will be Personal Baggage Officers, charwomen Woman Obligers, and waiters—I know not what. Public Nutrition Attendants, perhaps.

And the Cycle (fear Government personnel) may move full circle into the higher levels. Indeed, it is there already. Business men are no longer directors or managers, but "executives". Men who write occasional articles on public affairs are "publicists" or "propagandists". Will any don or scholar be content much longer with the name of Fellow? Every chap is a fellow, after all—a most degrading term. They will have to be College Executives or Principal Instructors. I myself am not very happy about "writer". Everybody can write. And even "author" is very short and simple—I mean, it shows a pomposity-deficiency. We shall have to be Literary Constructionists or

Verbal Experts and Entertainers. Anyhow, it is thought, the Chancellor of the Exchequer will have to be vigilant, or Mr. Hopper may prove to have been a veritable Frankenstein which will set the nation on the Gadarene descent to Status-Inflation.

Others in well-informed quarters (but why "quarters"? who have been labouring long and successfully to get the graceful word "deratisation" into the English language, consider Mr. Hopper's new title to be reactionary, if not potentially retrogressive. "Of course," they cry, whizzing round the circles or hopping from one quarter to another, "he should have been a Deratisation Control Executive!"

But then his salary would have been six pound ten. A. P. H.

## Sometimes Even Now

WITH blood and destruction so in use and horrors so many and deep, there's no call for superstitions or night-fancies of any sort. None whatever. Outboded by reality, the sad augurs mock their own presage and conjured ghosts squeak and gibber with irritation at making so little mark. How could they, when an apocalyptic of death and damnation comes with every morning paper? Begone wraith! You clank your chains in vain.

Time was when winter brought-in Hecate and all her crew. And what a shower! Witches, warlocks, Jack o' lanterns, goblins, spectre-horsemen and (in Scotland) bogles and bochans. The air was ridden with them. Moor and mountain could hardly give them space. The very marshes turned reception-area for evacuated fiends. There was the demand.

Where are ye now? Aye, where? How have ye left unwalked the country churchyard, untroubled the black-weeded pool, unhaunted the rocky wood, ye once familiar spirits! No more you stir our hair. The Axis has usurped your usual reign. So I feel tolerant, almost kindly, thinking of you not as fearful visitors but rather as erring extravagant spirits (like black-market whisky), as much hunted as haunting. Where are ye now? In hell, I suppose, unemployed.

Tolerant, I said, and kindly. Dear old ghosts. Ridiculous that I should ever have spun on my heel fearing to find myself dreadfully attended. No harm in ghosts. None at all . . . That's what I keep telling myself now as I take my midnight way with the

mist seething round, the hedges a frozen lace-work and a waning moon making luminous shrouds of the miasma. It would be waning!

I think of Occupied Europe, the underground movements, real dangers, real fears. Like Traddles, who used to draw skeletons on his slate for comfort. Skeletons? Not the best remembrance among these frosted branches. If it wasn't for the mist now. Mist's so queer and cold, the very thing for wraiths.

The cosy pub I left, the fire, the glasses agleam. Ah, that's better. And the agreeable cheery American voices. Cheery normal voices. Nothing eldritch about Arkansas. So feel I nothing of the cool clear air or of the dead leaves rustling drearily. Well, there are no dead leaves here and no wind to stir them.

What is that faint crackling behind me? Nothing, of course; or a field-mouse. Or something. Anyway, nothing. Why on earth should it drop into my mind now, that old Scottish tale of the dead who leave their graves and land with a sudden leap on the traveller's back? Turn round? Ridiculous: that would be giving way. Stop? Well, perhaps that. Casually, so that if . . . so that who—damn it! I stop. Did my footsteps go on just a trifle after? Pooh! on again: but surely faintly, just a trifle out of timing. Suppose now that such a one, stealthily pursuing, were gathering himself for his sudden spring—*crackle!*—ah, now! I spin round on my heel. . . . Nothing, of course—nothing whatever.

Yes, there are certainly some grim things happening in the world. Starvation, mass-murders . . . If there's one lively place in the world it's an English pub with all its cheery bottles and cheery people and . . . Why does that gate clang on a windless night? Because somebody's coming through it, of course.

"Oh, good night!"

Really, what a stupid state to be in!

Another hundred yards there should be a wood. I spoke to a soldier this night about Reality. He said it was a flux that quivered between the seer and the thing, that so much was subjective, that each lived in a private world, and what wasn't was as true as what was. A subtle soldier. I wonder if he was right? On second thoughts, I wonder if he *was*? But the Americans talked to him too. Still, were they . . .? Come, the wood.

It's lucky I know this road or I might go astray. Lonely country too—not many houses: sad sodden fields. Here a woman would come to wait her



*"I feel confident it's all going to be over very soon—last night I dreamt I was queueing for a Mediterranean cruise."*

demon lover, here dead-man's fair be nigh. I'm not very happy in my quotations to-night.

If I don't glimpse that wood in another minute I'm going to be anxious. I'm going to be more than anxious. There's only one road hereabouts and if it isn't going where it should, where is it going? I'm no Tam o' Shanter to revel at a witches' conference. Are there trees behind that mist to the left? Are there fields? Is there anything, or does the world end there? The mist eddies and shifts and quivers in the ghastly moon. So do I. It lifts and I see—water. *Water?* Then, oh—believe it!—rises a woman's voice in wild lament.

Petrified I wait while it comes nearer, and there suddenly plunges into my private world—an AT, with her arm round another AT, singing some desperate blues. What macabre vision I had expected I don't know, but thank heaven for that honest khaki!

"Tell me," I say, finding speech, "where is the wood? There should be a wood."

"You're through it, kiddo," she cries, "you're out of the wood."

"I saw water."

"Oh, that. The field's flooded, that's all. S'long."

Away she goes with her mate, wailing worse than ever. But what sweet music!

## At the Play

### "THE CRADLE SONG" (APOLLO)

THIS colloquy in a Spanish cloister is the gentlest play in London. Although, in Sheridan's phrase, love gilds the scene and women guide the plot, there are remarkably few alarms. On an afternoon in 1895 the life of a convent of Enclosed Dominican Nuns is rippling uneventfully along. It is the birthday of the *Prioress*. Shyly, the novices make her a present. One of them, *Marcella*, does penance for a moment of schoolgirl mischief. Gradually the assembled nuns reveal their natures: the gracious *Prioress*, played at the Apollo by Miss LILLY KANN; the *Mother Vicar* (Miss MURIEL AKED), outwardly the convent's Miss Murdstone; the tranquil *Mistress of the Novices*; the novices themselves—*Marcella* and *Sagrario*, *Juana* the peasant-girl (Miss WENDY HILLER), and the wilting *Maria Jesus*. The doctor *Don José* (Mr. FREDERICK LEISTER) calls as he has done for more than twenty years and will for another twenty yet. Little is amiss. Then, as afternoon draws in, the door-bell rings. Outside, a baby girl has been left in a basket, a foundling committed by her mother to the convent's care. Here, for the cloistered women, is an hour of rapture. The child, adopted by *Don José*, is entrusted to *Juana of the Cross*. The curtain falls.

When it rises again, now upon the convent parlour, eighteen years have passed. The girl *Teresa* is leaving the convent to marry. The nuns have filled her trunk. From without the grille her lover *Antonio* thanks the community. *Teresa* says her tearful good-byes; irrevocably the door closes behind her; spring in the convent has faded into the melancholy of autumn, and the nuns file in silence towards their chapel.

That is all. GREGORIO and MARIA MARTINEZ SIERRA have written a tale for the melting mood, "harmonious charmingly," but not, it will be realized, a general choice. Importunate playgoers who insist upon pace and action, and who need more than the

atmospherics of character in an unfamiliar setting, may listen to *The Cradle Song* with impatience. Others will find pleasure in the ebb and flow of conventual life and a true emotional quality in the love of these repressed votarists for their foundling. There are moving passages: the flutter at the child's discovery; the pitiful transgressions of *Sister Marcella*, homesick for the world outside; and that unexpected moment in which the *Mother Vicar*, whose astringency has relieved the play's linked sweetness, fights back her grief after *Teresa's*

second act, that blend of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso," are especially inclined to drag and falter.

The girl *Teresa*, the convent's blessed damozel who is all sweetness and light, needs the most tactful handling if she is not to become a burden. Miss YVONNE MITCHELL manages to look Spanish and—partnered by Mr. JULIAN DALLAS's *Antonio*—to deal pleasantly with that long love-duet through the grille. (Why must one think, with sad irreverence, of *Pyramus and Thisbe*?) But this *Teresa* is altogether too frolicsome:

*Antonio's* awakening may be sharp. Early in the play one is similarly embarrassed by the four young novices—children in uniform, they seem—who would be happier in their cubicles than the cloister. Nevertheless it is Miss ANN HEFFERNAN as the restless *Marcella*, so unwisely dedicated to contemplation, who goes on to give a performance that lingers in the mind when much else has vanished.

*Sister Juana of the Cross*, the girl of peasant stock who mothers *Teresa* from the start, is a more directly appealing figure; Miss WENDY HILLER, better here in maturity than in youth, plays her with quiet control and makes her effects without fuss. Miss LILLY KANN, though she does not give the impression of a Spanish *Prioress*, is benevolent and matriarchal; and Miss MURIEL AKED, adding to her Murdstone a touch of the long-remembered Miss Snell, is both acidly amusing and, at the close, pathetic as a



THE NEWCOMER SHOWS SIGNS OF APPROVAL.

<i>Sister Juana</i> . . . . .	MISS WENDY HILLER
<i>The Doctor</i> . . . . .	MR. FREDERICK LEISTER
<i>Mother Prioress</i> . . . . .	MISS LILLY KANN
<i>Mother Vicar</i> . . . . .	MISS MURIEL AKED

carriage has rattled down the road and the bell has summoned the convent to its devotions.

These scenes must vibrate in the memory. Even so *The Cradle Song*—though it remains a delicate miniature—does not affect one as on its first appearance eighteen years ago. In the Apollo revival the play (adapted by Mr. JOHN GARRETT UNDERHILL) seems to be slighter than it was and its charm more evanescent. Mr. JOHN GIELGUD's production is thoughtful and decorative—obviously this convent has little if anything to worry about—but the total effect is too calculated: the play does not burst suddenly into flower. Portions of the

stern precisian, nine-tenths eagle, one-tenth dove. Others in the flock of nuns are suitably "sober, steadfast, and demure"—Miss ANN WILTON, *Mistress of the Novices*, is notably good—and as the old and privileged doctor, the burden of whose part is "Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more," Mr. FREDERICK LEISTER, though he too hardly suggests Spain, succeeds in enlivening the conventual scene whenever he appears.

### "THE GAY FOLLIES" (CAMBRIDGE)

Although *The Gay Follies* have made a valiant attempt to establish a beach-head in Seven Dials it is doubtful whether the position can be held.



One misses the deck-chairs and the sound of the sea. Gaiety on the first night was noticeably absent.

The idea had been promising: a co-optimistic pierrot show by various authors and composers—principally Mr. FRANK EYTON, Mr. BILLY REVELL, and Mr. NAT D. AYER—in the manner of the famous Pélissier Folies. Now and then during the performance spirits rose: when, for example, Mr. MORRIS HARVEY spoke an A. P. Herbert lyric as an old boatman grieved that his *Mudlark* had missed Dunkirk; when, again, Miss VERA LENNOX and Mr. RAYMOND NEWELL began to guy traditional musical comedy in what proved to be a long-drawn burlesque; and when Miss LENNOX was appearing as a Cockney broadcaster in a sketch which fizzled weakly.

Hopes were vain. The players tried many devices. They shook the chestnut-boughs. They offered the song of sentiment, the patriotic ballad, the pierrot-and-pierrette number, and even—in the fifth year of the war—a skit on evacuees. Towards the end of the evening Mr. HARVEY (a former member of the Pélissier troupe) and Mr. AYER endeavoured to revive old memories—one by impersonating a group of past actors, from Tree to Bouchier, and the other by playing some of his celebrated songs from *The Bing Boys*. By then it was too late to stir enthusiasm. One can merely record that this attempt to restore the Folies has been made, and that, besides the players mentioned, Mr. BILLY REVELL (an active and dogged comedian), Mr. JACK MAYER, and the Misses JANE WELSH, JENNY DEAN, JOYCE LINDEN and JUNE FIELDS appear in a variety of parts. J. C. T.

## Letter Home

EGYPT,  
January 30th 1944

DEAR EDITH,—Yes, I know you will say "Still in Egypt? Surely he must have developed some lingering disease, or his mind must have become unhinged," but this, oddly enough, is not the case. While there is of course a decided tendency for British troops in Egypt to be suddenly whisked away to closer contact with the enemy, everybody except the Naafi knows that there are still a lot of us here.

Most of us spend our time wondering which way we will go home in the end. The other day I overheard a Yorkshire lance-corporal say that he hoped to be

allowed to go via Greece and work his way up gradually through the Balkans and then through France—fighting of course all the way. He said that only by this method could one gradually get used to the British climate again. If a man went home direct, by air, he would be almost certain to suffer from severe colds for a long time. It would be much healthier to fight one's way gradually back.

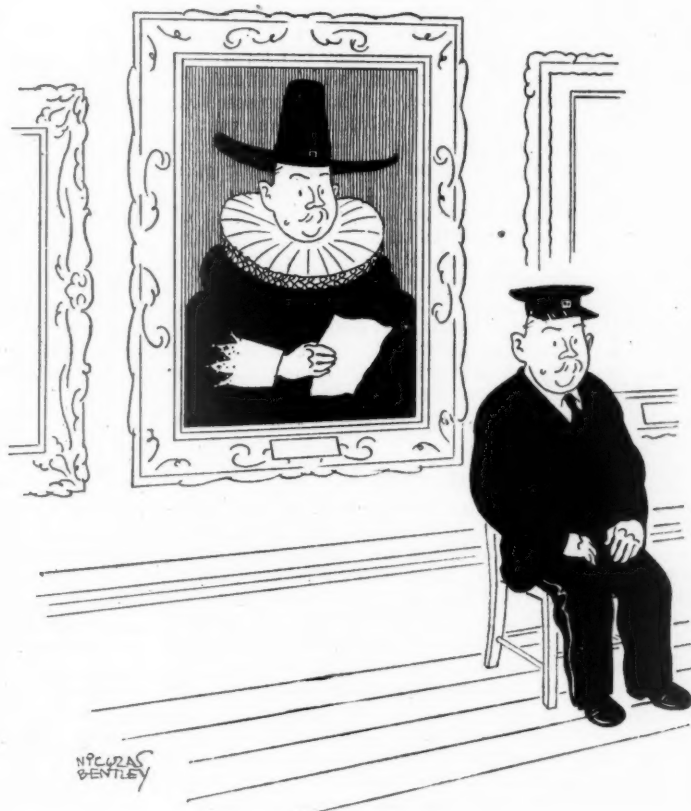
Personally I am not so much worried about how I will get there, because, despite its odd ways, the Army generally delivers the goods, even if the goods are only soldiers who have been left too long in Africa. But I think a good deal about my actual home-coming, or home-going.

I want to arrive in England on a rainy day. I am more home-sick for rain than for almost anything else—except, oddly enough, pork sausages and clean laundry. English pork sausages, I am told, have very little pork in them now, but I hope that by the time I get home they will be back to the old standard. The flavour of sausages in Egypt is indescribable. Old hands out here do not of course

allow them on their plates, and always watch with awe the expressions of newcomers who make the foolhardy attempt to eat them. The pleased smile of anticipation, the raised fork, the quick exploratory bite, and then the contorted and amazed visage of realization. A few hardy fellows, mostly Yorkshiremen, take a second bite just to make sure their imagination has not been running riot, and then leave the room hurriedly. Even in their shape Egyptian sausages have a sinister aspect. They are very long and thin and straight.

As for clean linen, it is quite unknown in Egypt. Reasonably white clothes go to the dhobi and come back grey. After you have worn them for a few days the dirt from the laundry begins to shake off a bit, but however long you wear them they never come quite clean again, so you have to buy new ones when you want a clean change, and you cannot get new ones because by a strange chance whatever size you are the Officers' Shop always has all the other sizes except that one.

Your loving husband,  
LIONEL.



## Our Booking-Office

(By Mr. Punch's Staff of Learned Clerks)

James Joyce

IN *James Joyce: a Critical Introduction* (FABER, 8/6) Mr. HARRY LEVIN, a young American critic, has made a resolute if not altogether successful attempt to be calm and coherent about a writer whom for many reasons it has been easy to worship or to execrate, but very difficult to judge fairly. There is a good deal of jargon in the book. This, for example, is how Mr. LEVIN expresses the not very startling truth that Joyce, like other writers, had to attempt to bring order out of chaos—"The paradox of *Ulysses* is that it imposes a static ideal upon kinetic material. . . . The theme of the city calls for particular and perpetual movement. The pattern of the artist makes for universal and timeless repose." The shadow of Marx darkens many pages. "Under the increasing pressures of capitalism, the petty bourgeoisie is bound to present a dismal picture of triviality and frustration," Mr. LEVIN writes, with the implication that Bloom and Stephen Dedalus and Earwicker would have been essentially different under State Socialism. But when he disentangles himself from current critical formulas, and brings his considerable insight and common sense to bear on Joyce, he has much of interest to say. "All his sensibility," he writes of Joyce, "is reserved for himself; his attitude towards others is consistently caustic." *Ulysses*, Mr. LEVIN says, lacks love, friendship and magnanimity. Intensely self-absorbed, Joyce had little sympathy to spare for others, and was yet, illogically but humanly, deeply pained if others were as negligent of him as he of them. "His friends," writes Mr. LEVIN, "report that his last year was clouded by the indifferent response to *Finnegans Wake*," a book which its author, one might have supposed, would not have expected to progress rapidly in the affections of the general public. In his freer moments Joyce was a superb humorist. "The *vis comica* was his natural bent," Mr. LEVIN suggests, and might have gone on to show how richly it manifests itself throughout *Ulysses* whenever Joyce in the person of the sentimental self-pitying Stephen Dedalus is out of the way and Leopold Bloom holds the centre of the stage. Bloom, the butt of everyone, stirred some sympathy in his creator. But with the passing of Bloom, Joyce's capacity to get outside himself passed too, and although Mr. LEVIN does his best to hypnotize himself into a proper admiration for *Finnegans Wake*, he allows his real feeling to appear when he quotes Johnson on Macpherson's *Ossian*—"Sir, a man might write such stuff for ever, if he would abandon his mind to it."

H. K.

## Nemesis on the Door-Mat

There is one thing to be said about the home life that has become increasingly unobtainable—it may soon assume the glamour of a forlorn hope. The good mother will be able to say with Coriolanus "I shall be lov'd when I am lack'd"; and the bad mother will see the State take over her task, and bungle it, with (one hopes) appropriate pangs. A career such as that of *Myra Carroll* (COLLINS, 8/6) will cease to enlist even the modicum of sympathy which Miss NOEL STREATFIELD rather audaciously demands for it. For *Myra* is another *Dodo*: one of those idiotic beauties who marry into a blameless peerage and pursue a career of communal folly after producing a small family by way of a sop to *Debreit*. In *Myra's* case an orphan's apprenticeship to vice under an incontinent aunt is a

mitigating circumstance. The expert dictatorship of the *Nannie* who takes on the *Carrol* nursery is another. The tussle between *Nannie* and *Myra* for the bodies and souls of the latter's offspring brings a novel rather slow to gain momentum to a stimulating climax. The regrouping before the final curtain, however, strikes one as too fortuitous to be impressive.

H. P. E.

## Word-gathering

Almost as soon as the modern English language came to be spoken people began picking on it. Among the mud-slinging Elizabethans the use of words became a battlefield. In the firmer Augustan age choice spirits, with Swift at the head, cast about for "some method of ascertaining and fixing our language for ever"—i.e., an Academy ("the decrees of which," exclaimed Dr. Johnson stoutly, "every man would have been willing, and many would have been proud, to disobey"). Nineteenth century liberalism dawned, and you hear much about the "freedom" of English grammar from inflexions, as though they were tariff walls. 1913, and you have Robert Bridges and the Society for Pure English "believing that language is, or should be, democratic in origin. . . ." Alas! in 1926 Robert Graves declares the poor S.P.E. is "the literary equivalent of political Fascism. . . ." Meanwhile English passes blithely on, gorging new formations, inexplicably rejecting others or forgetting them. The truth is that the management not only has no right to refuse admission, but cannot complain about what is already in or has been crowded out. The company is too mixed—and, after all, who is the management? But there has never been any lack of people to take on this job. And latest of these, most charming and most modest, is Mr. IVOR BROWN in his little anthology of rare and curious words, *Just Another Word* (CAPE, 6/-). People who write about language should use it properly, and Mr. BROWN is clear, dry and witty as always. As a phonologist he is horrid—see his note, on page 86, on the word "choose"; but his particular plea is: Away with officialese, back to the "Biblical monosyllable." (Swift, by the by, calls monosyllables "the disgrace of our language.") He shares the quite common illusion that the English of Wales, Ireland and the North is "close to Chaucer" and therefore more "authentically English" than anything else. Rubbish! English is, and always will be, as she is spoken. But what does it matter? Here is the most fascinating pastime of all. The mighty *N.E.D.* has made it possible for anyone, Mr. BROWN included, to be an etymologist without tears; and his pleasant book will be welcome to thousands of happy amateur word-gatherers.

P. M. F.

## A Free Lance in China

Divorced in her native America in her early twenties, the author of *Battle Hymn of China* (GOLLANCZ, 7/6) naïvely remarks that "marriage is at best an economic investment, at its worst, a relic of human slavery"—an indictment which would fit most professions from a king's to a ticket-collector's. It undoubtedly fits Miss AGNES SMEDLEY's own trade of journalism, and the courage and perseverance she exhibits in getting her own way as a writer would have rendered her a redoubtable matriarch. But the gods saw otherwise. A liaison with a revolutionary Indian in Berlin sent her to China *en route* for India. And in China she stayed, aiding first the Reds and then the United Front, long after her *Frankfurter Zeitung* had dismissed her. Arriving in Manchuria in 1928, she left Hong Kong the summer before it fell. Apart from its feminist leaven, the sole cohesive element of her interesting

irresponsible book is its generous passion for the under-dog; though she never refuses to exploit the temporarily uppermost animal, American or British, if he can be useful. The great formative experience of her life is her intellectual apprenticeship to Lu Hsün, doctor and professor of literature, a man above cliques and personal ambitions, a truly aristocratic servant of mankind.

H. P. E.

### Victorian England

Sir GEORGE ARTHUR is inclined to apologize for adding to the books about Queen Victoria. In this case there is no need. A book that can glance aside from the alluring topic of the Sovereign to tell how her poorest subjects lived and what it was like to go third class by railway a hundred years ago may be quite a good essay in social history; if not a first-rate biography. *Concerning Queen Victoria and Her Son* (ROBERT HALE, 12/6) is not jealously concerned with that august relationship and has little new to say of it, but it makes two points that are worth making. One is that the Prince's victories in the long domestic contest, though less renowned than the Queen's, nevertheless existed; the other that towards the end mother and son came closer together. The rest is a string of such gems—rather loosely strung—as the remark of an incautious American Ambassador, who leaned across at dinner and said "Queen Victoria, I have been telling your daughter what a fine woman she is." Though we are spared references, the author has evidently been at all the gossip books, and he has not wasted his time. Out of a highly entertaining chaos comes, if not exactly a new woman, at least some new aspects of a very famous one, notably her affection for the Empress Eugénie, the feminine (and rather touching) anxiety to insist that her popularity at least equalled that of her son and daughter-in-law, and the paradox by which she gave her blessing to jam-rations for her soldiers and yet did everything in her power to retain the punishment of flogging in the Army—"a custom," observes Sir GEORGE ARTHUR, "which savoured of cruelty."

J. S.

### John Butler Yeats

John Butler Yeats died in New York shortly after the last war, at the age of eighty-two. Though his painting, which had occupied him for sixty years, never brought him much fame or money, he retained his unquenchable buoyancy till the end, writing shortly before his death to his son, the poet W. B. Yeats, that the portrait he had just completed of himself was his *magnum opus*. He had, he said, been an unconscionable burden to his son and daughter-in-law on their comparatively slender resources, but when they saw the portrait they would forgive him. Thirty years earlier he had written to his son: "I am most awfully grateful to you for the £5. . . I am, however, *extremely* hopeful." It is impossible not to be reminded of Mr. John Dickens, who served his son Charles as the model for Micawber, and, like the elder Yeats, had a trust in life and a spontaneous enjoyment of it denied to the man of genius he had begotten. But John Butler Yeats had none of the less attractive qualities of John Dickens. He did not exploit his charm, or shirk his responsibilities, and his love of life had its source not in an unthinking gusto but in an instinctively happy and harmonious nature. His intelligence was as fine as his temperament, as is evident throughout these *Letters* (FABER, 16/-), which Mr. JOSEPH HONE has edited with his accustomed skill. Most of the letters are to W. B. Yeats, and though his father was very proud of him, he saw his faults clearly, and warned him, long before the tendencies referred to had begun to dominate his work, against "aristocratic illusions, sacerdotalism,

the ferocious absurdity of the Overman." Life, not ideas about it, and human beings, not theories of society, were what the elder Yeats valued—"There are people who are only interested in *things*; and these people always give themselves airs and say they 'don't like gossip,' but Shakespeare, your mother and I like to talk about people." In the same spirit he lamented the didacticism of Wordsworth and Browning—"All literature has gone over to the side of the schoolmaster, and it used to be carried on by the boys themselves." But his disapproval of didacticism did not imply a relish for mere sensation. In America, where he spent his last years, everyone seemed to him too easily satisfied—"Art is the expression of unsatisfied human desire. . . . If we would restore its intensity to poetry and art we must rediscover the doctrine of the Fall."

H. K.

### Wind and Water

If only Mr. JAMES HANLEY had been content to write a plain straightforward story about a man who went to sea because his father had been a sailor before him, if he had written ordinarily about his adventures in the last war, the tragedy of being "hard-bound" afterwards, and his sea-service in the second great war, we might have more wit left with which to consider the problems of merchant seamen. But *Sailor's Song* (NICHOLSON AND WATSON, 8/6) begins with the delirium of *Manion*, an old-timer aged between fifty and sixty, when he is lying wounded on a raft, and works jerkily and hysterically backwards. There is a great deal too much of this sort of thing, even when one makes allowances for delirium: "O.K. by me, sirs, I'll sing a song. A long one or a short one, a thin one or a fat one, a loud one or a soft one, I can sing a song, sirs. . . . I know a river, know a sea, know where oceans are. Knew this before eye saw them—in the bone, sirs, felt it in the bone." There is no doubt that the author is sincere. He realizes that sailors had a hard time between the two wars and he fears for them after this one, but need he warn us in such staccato screams? Even his publishers seem to have caught the infection and refer on the jacket to "this very great novel," which has "all the poetry of the sea, the weight of water, the feel of wind, the sight of sky," and, as if that were not enough, "something more."

B. E. B.

### Discourses on Disraeli

It is very clear that Sir R. GEORGE STAPLEDON has an almost fanatical admiration for the Tory leader of Victorian days. Disraeli impressed him, he admits, as a profound thinker, a great statesman, a unique novelist. Yet from his preface to this book—*Disraeli and the New Age* (FABER, 10/6)—it appears that his interest in the man was only aroused recently through the accident of being given a copy of Bryant's *English Saga*. This led to further study—the novels and various other books, in which Sir GEORGE claims to have discovered ideas and opinions that apply to the present situation of this country in a truly remarkable manner, so much so that he was stimulated to write on the subject. His method has been to select texts from Disraeli's novels or speeches and follow them with short sermons amplifying the points made. There are nineteen of these discourses, ranging from Agriculture, on which the author is an authority, and the Church—he professes he is no churchman—to such subjects as Duty, Time, Space and Language. Generally speaking Sir GEORGE's sermons make rather difficult reading, though their general tendency is sound enough, a stressing of the value of rural life and the agricultural class as against the Manchester school of industrial development.

L. W.



## The Amateur Shepherd

**S**HEEP, like most of us, have their troubles, and when the colour of England's dress was changed from verdant green to arable brown bleats of protest went up all over the country.

One meeting assembled on a few acres close to my windows, and the shrill cries of babies who ought to have been asleep in bed, mingled with the hoarse calls of mummies who had mislaid their babies, and the deep bass of grousing old men, blended into a symphony of sound that only a shepherd could appreciate.

But the shepherd has parked his crook and moves about laden with hurdles and posts and wire netting, whilst his dog barks for ever without any sign of exhaustion.

The shepherd says anyone can hurdle sheep if they make holes in the ground with a crowbar, stand the hurdles upright in the holes and slip a piece of wire over the ends of the two hurdles which make the front door.

But no one can be certain the sheep will agree not to use it, and at the meeting next to me and my house there were agitators against the framework of government. One of them fell heavily on an obstacle to freedom and found himself face to face with the problem of what to do next. It was solved for him by the inevitable mutton-head barging into him from behind. In less than a bleating minute a dozen were out, standing in a wedge formation, with those in front shouting "Back" and those behind shouting "Forward." The rest were merely yelling "School, school." As the mob swayed backwards and forwards more hurdles collapsed, and finally the flock formed up in extended order just as I grabbed the telephone. As I did not expect the message to reach the shepherd until the late afternoon, travelling as it must via the farmer's wife, the farmer, and possibly the boy who lives up the road, I whistled for the old lady and went out to do the job.

Sheep have their own regulations and foot drill, and the sight of a man with a *silent* dog automatically punches a plan into the sheep's head. Sweeping across the field like irregular cavalry they attempted a pincer movement, but I rolled up one of the arms of the pincers easily enough whilst the old lady held the other with an unblinking eye.

Unfortunately I overlooked the gap in the hedge, and before I could close

it half the flock was out in the lane, the remainder being well pinned down. The only thing to do was to get in front of the sheep in the lane and drive them back again, and although no one has ever been known to do this successfully alone, I kept on trying. Eventually we reached the main road, so I followed my flock, and as we passed the spot where the milestone rested I thought of the end of the road which ran into the barbed-wire entanglements on the coast about twenty miles ahead. But, luckily, the driver of a jeep was just as anxious as I was to get past, and he suggested I should go with him. We increased the speed of the flock from five to six then to ten miles an hour. They gave it up at fifteen under repeated short sharp blows of the horn.

And so we began the homeward journey. As we approached the end of the lane I realized I had no stop posted there, and sheep have no homing instinct, so we stuck to the main road. I thought of the end of it, which in this direction would be either Oxford or London, depending on the sheep's head in front. It was getting late and my pocket knife, overcome by so much lamb and mutton, crept into my hand and began playing nervously with it. I was feeling the edge when I heard a sharp bark, a car drove up behind me and the shepherd's dog jumped out.

\* \* \* \* \*

When we were all safely hurdled once more, the shrill cries of delight of the babies reunited to their mummies, mingled with the noise made by the old men (who had stayed behind) respinning their frontier yarns in self-defence, made music which, although not to be compared with the roar of London traffic, is a passable country imitation.

o o

## What are the Poets Saying?

**P**EOPLE who know nothing about poetry—the sort who think that every poem begins "What boots it tumty tum," or "I remember, I remember tum-tum tum-tumty tum"—keep asking what has happened to our war poets. Where (they say) are the great poems of this war? When (they add) are our young men going to write something to rank with so-and-so and thingummy?

Well, speaking for oneself, one would like to go on record as suggesting that so-and-so is overrated, while as for

thingummy—but that is perhaps no argument. If, speaking as a poet on behalf of poets, we are to answer these people effectively we must answer them on their own level. We will start, then, with a question in return. How long has the war been going on? Four and a half years, not a day longer. Now suppose that in peace-time a poet had been silent for four and a half years. Should we then have heard an outcry from an impatient public? Would stockbrokers have wanted to know why we were writing nothing to rank with *Maud*? Would wine-and-spirit merchants have demanded to be informed what was holding us back from penning verses equal to *In Memoriam*? Would butter-and-egg men have been imploring us to tell them when we were going to produce another *Childe Harold*? The answer is, in basic English, No.

Why, then, should these people expect us to be in a constant fret of production now, just because there is a war on? We poets resent, more than we can express in prose, this cry of "Production, production, production!" Are we an aircraft factory, to be constantly pestered about our output by chaps in bowler hats who can hardly tell one end of a hexameter from the other, and probably will go down to their graves with the impression that it is an instrument for measuring the cubic capacity of a sprocket valve? We have other things on our mind at the present time.

Our questioners may say—in fact they have said already—that the poets of the last war had other things on their minds too, but that they found time even in the trenches to write great poems, jotting them down on old envelopes while sitting on the frestep of a trench or on an upturned ammunition box.

Ha! we reply shortly. Old envelopes indeed! We well remember the one occasion in this war when we ourself got hold of an old envelope with some vague notion of jotting something down on it. We were—temporarily—employed in an office job at the time, helping the Adjutant with typing and such. He found us just as we were sharpening our pencil, with the envelope on the desk in front of us.

"What's this, old boy, scribbling?" he said, not unkindly. "Mustn't scribble on old envelopes, old boy. They come in again, you know." And he pulled one of those gummed labels out of his pocket and told us to stick it on the envelope so that it could be used again. We mumbled something about jotting down a verse or two, but he hardly listened. "Save it till after



### Gerbini

Night 20/21 July 1943

**P**ROFANE not with profundities these casual graves,

Words are but platitudes to the dead.  
Raise no echoes among these blackened trees;  
Their tale is best untold.

Here, where they died in twos and threes,  
Leave them in their brotherhood.

Nor regiment in well-kept rows among the flowers

Those whose last hours

Ran in this shell-tormented wood.

Rather let the earth cave in upon their grave

And their cross decay,

Or let the cactus with its prickly fruit

Be symbol for their Resurrection Day.

What if Death's moods are various?

We cannot find out why, to fulfil what secret laws,

His choice should pass us by and fall on either side.

But we know the stray bullet cannot make a hero,

Nor blood more sanctify our cause.

So, mock not these dead with words they cannot understand.

But, to commemorate this dust

Raise a plain stone pillar, if you must,

And write upon it, in a soldier's hand.

"What man can suffer, These have suffered,  
What man can do, They did."

Let all other praise be silent

And, like our grief, be hid.

the war, old boy," he said. "Mustn't slacken off just yet, you know. Never swop horses while crossing streams, eh, eh?" And he bustled out to do something or other. . . .

Nor is the envelope shortage all. Other obstacles are holding us back from composing great war poems, too numerous to mention (the obstacles, we mean). Not least of them is the censorship, both official and unofficial, which, as everybody knows, is much tighter in this war than it was in the last. For instance, we were once asked to contribute a little something to the Battalion magazine.

"Nothing morbid, now," said the editor, looking at us keenly. "And," he added, scrutinizing a typewritten sheet he had in his hand, "nothing of an imperialistic nature, or such as might seem incompatible with the ideals of self-determination expressed in the Atlantic Charter, or such as might be construed as propaganda for any viewpoint whatever, or such as might cause alarm or despondency among either our own men or our Allies, or"—he waved the paper vaguely—"so on and so on. I leave it to you to choose your own subject."

Needless to say, we did not write anything on that occasion, or indeed on any other as yet. We can bide our time.

## Ballotomania

PAPA talks about the coal-mining ballot and says it is a wonderful idea. Mama says yes, it's funny nobody thought of it before. Grandmama says they did, there was something about it in the paper the other day, it may have been the wireless, Richard ought to know, he's at school and does history. Richard says I'll say I do. Penelope says in France they always used to be having lotteries and that's the same thing. I say France isn't England. John says shut up, I want to read.

Grandmama says talking about coal, it's a bit chilly, isn't it, I suppose that window isn't open? Mama says that window hasn't been opened since the war, it can't be without pulling down the black-out. Papa says seeing as how it's so cold in the Channel, why shouldn't we have another lump of coal on the fire? I say there isn't any

more coal in the house, someone will have to go out into the garden and get some. Penelope says I can't because I've got slippers on. Richard says oh, yuh? John says I wish you people wouldn't make such a noise, I'm reading.

I say you're taking us all to the cinema to-morrow afternoon, aren't you, papa? Penelope says yes, I believe it's that picture Mrs. Webfoot saw in London and said whatever we do we mustn't miss it. Papa says I'd rather not go really. Mama says nonsense, you mustn't be an old fogey. Grandmama says I hope it isn't cowboys. Richard says cowboys my foot. Mama says if the laundry doesn't come to-morrow morning someone will have to stay at home in the afternoon, else they'll take it away again like they did last week, they come at such extraordinary times nowadays, there's no telling when. Papa says yes, I'm right out of handkerchiefs, I don't know what would happen if I got flu. John says, oh, *can't* you all shut up?

Papa says well whoever goes to get the coal will not be the one to stay at home to-morrow afternoon. Richard says I'm not buying that. I say anyhow the laundry may come to-morrow morning for all anybody knows and then we can *all* go. Grandmama says I'm not sure that we ought to burn any more coal, what would

Lord Woolton say? Mama says Lord Woolton isn't *coal*, dear. Penelope says anyhow food isn't Lord Woolton now if that's what you're thinking of. John says I do *wish* you chaps would leave a chap alone to read when he wants to.

Papa goes out of the room and returns after five minutes with his old bowler hat, which is full of little bits of paper.

He says since nobody will volunteer for the disagreeable duty of fetching a piece of coal from the garden or for staying at home and not going to the cinema to-morrow afternoon, we will ballot, the bits of paper in my hat have numbers on them, 1 for Grandmama, 2 for Mama, 3 for me, 4 for Penelope, 5 for John, 6 for Richard, and 7 for Horace. Grandmama will make the draw.

Grandmama is speechless. Mama frowns. Penelope's eyes fill with tears. John mutters. Richard sighs. I fume.

Grandmama draws the number 3. Papa has to fetch the coal.

Penelope jumps up and says don't be silly papa, I can easily put on another pair of shoes and do it. Richard says I'll do it. John says nonsense I will. I say don't be stupid, my hands are dirty anyhow.

Richard brings in one lump of coal, John brings another, I bring a third.

Papa says that's not the idea at all, I ought to have fetched the coal, never mind, that ballot hasn't worked very well, let's try another and ballot for who stays at home to-morrow afternoon in case the laundry comes, no volunteering to take his place this time.

Grandmama draws again. Once more it is the number 3.

Penelope says you'll still pay for us all to go, won't you, papa? Papa says, yes. Grandmama says it would have done you a lot of good to go, too. Richard says tough.

Papa throws the pieces of paper into the fire but they fall short in the fender. I pick them up and observe that they are all marked with the figure 3. I reflect that papa is nothing if not a psychologist and that he hates the cinema. I observe also that he has his eye on the book which John is reading. It is a book which John gave him for Christmas and has been reading ever since. To-morrow afternoon papa will have a chance of reading it.



"... And finally I must thank the anonymous donor of fifteen book-tokens."

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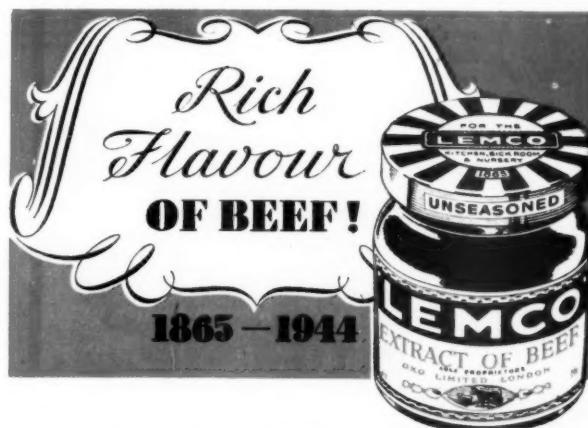
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